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SUBJECT: GABON: ECCAS/CEEAC PITCHES FOR U.S. MILITARY
COOPERATION

REF: 08 LIBREVILLE 420

Classified By: DCM Nathan Holt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) The head of the military joint staff of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEEAC) made a pitch for U.S. assistance, outlined regional security initiatives and introduced his multinational staff in a lively meeting January 12 meeting with Emboffs and the visiting AF/C desk officer. Separately, a senior Gabonese military official described Gabonese participation in CEEAC initiatives and thanked the United States for its bilateral military assistance. End Summary.

Pitch for Assistance to CEEAC

¶2. (C) "We will press forward whether you help us or not," ECCAS/CEEAC military chief of staff General Pierre Garcia said in a lively one-hour meeting January 12 with Emboffs and visiting AF/C desk officer Lisa Korte. "But why won't you help us?" Garcia claimed he had met with AFRICOM officials recently in Addis Ababa (NFI) and was briefed on U.S. assistance to other regional security organizations, citing ECOWAS (West Africa), SADC (Southern Africa) and IGAD (East Africa).

¶3. (C) Korte explained that the subject of potential assistance to CEEAC was under review and subject to a Presidential Determination. No such determination has yet been made, she advised. Nevertheless, we are closely monitoring CEEAC's progress.

¶4. (C) Flanked by a dozen senior officers from CEEAC member states, Garcia provided an elaborate account of CEEAC's history and ongoing security initiatives, including the formation of a joint staff, the ongoing FOMAC peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic, the potential deployment of observers along the Chad/Sudan border, and the formation of a standby peacekeeping brigade under the auspices of the African Union. The scheduled 2010 CEEAC joint military exercise in Angola would be a major test of the standby brigade's capabilities, he emphasized. And while CEEAC has so far had no direct military engagement in efforts to stabilize eastern DRC, Garcia said, the matter was under continuing review by CEEAC's political leadership.

¶5. (C) The European Union, France, Canada's Pearson Foundation and the African Development Bank all provide

assistance in one form or another to CEEAC security initiatives, the voluble Garcia continued. Regional approaches to regional problems, including security problems, are the wave of the future, he asserted. U.S. assistance would be better monitored if channeled through CEEAC and subject to the same level of accountability demanded by other donors, Garcia continued. (Note: Gen. Garcia has a checkered past, including accusations of complicity in summary executions during the civil war in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville). End Note.)

¶6. (C) Though not directly asked, Garcia expounded on the kinds of U.S. assistance that might be useful. U.S. "expertise" and training would be helpful, he said. Effective communications among various national units of CEEAC forces is a critical military challenge, he said. CEEAC required assistance in acquiring interoperable communications equipment and using the equipment effectively. It would also be useful if CEEAC forces could all wear the same uniforms, he added, particularly if uniforms could be obtained ahead of the 2010 joint exercise in Angola. The visit concluded with a tour of the joint staff's headquarters, including its small command center.

Gabonese Military Hospital to the DRC?

¶7. (C) Separately, a senior official in Gabon's Ministry of Defense (MOD) told Emboffs and Desk Officer Korte that Gabon will deploy a military field hospital to Goma in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Gabon made this

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commitment at a December 2008 meeting of military, police and immigration chiefs of CEEAC member states in Kinshasa, according to General Robert Mangollo M'Voulou, Secretary General in the Gabonese MOD.

¶8. (C) Mangollo said the hospital is intended to provide health services to the general population and that he hopes it will be deployed by February. Gabon's contribution will be made in conjunction with the commitment of other CEEAC member states to take concrete measures to support the stabilization of eastern DRC, Mangollo claimed. Mangollo, joined by a half dozen aides, said Gabon is proud of its record of support for CEEAC and looks forward to participating in the joint military exercise scheduled in 2010 in Angola. Gabon provided medical support for a similar exercise in Chad in 2007, Mangollo recalled. Mangollo said the CEEAC peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic has been sustained largely because of Gabonese leadership, without which the current process of political reconciliation in CAR would be impossible. Mangollo also noted that Gabon has provided military observers in Darfur, and is ready to participate in a force monitoring the Chad/Sudan border as envisioned by the March 2008 Dakar Accord.

¶9. (C) Mangollo thanked the United States for its engagement with the Gabonese military, praising our International Military Education and Training (IMET) program and pointing out the importance of English language training for the Gabonese military.

Comment

¶10. (C) CEEAC's security infrastructure is at best skeletal, and its ambitions considerably exceed its current capacity. Well-designed training and other assistance to CEEAC, consistent with U.S. policy on human rights and other issues, could make an important contribution to addressing regional security issues. We hope that the Presidential Determination, under senior level review in the last administration, can be moved forward again in this one. End

Comment.

¶11. (U) AF/C Desk Officer Korte did not have a chance to clear this cable before departing Libreville.

REDDICK